

L . A . C O U N T Y F I R E

ON THE LINE

WINTER 2007



LACoFD Gets Fit for Life

Cardiology
Program Saves
Lives

Firefighter Stress

KEEP UP TO DATE BY LOGGING IN @ WWW.FIRE.LACOUNTY.GOV

Photo by Chris Jensen



Our Radius Continues to Grow

Some people describe the scope of their daily lives in terms of a “two-mile radius,” feeling that they having little impact beyond that intangible mark. In our Department, our collective impact is much larger as we work together to save the lives and properties of four million residents living and working in our Los Angeles County Fire Department’s 2,296 square-mile area.

If you’ve ever wondered what personal affect you’re having as one member of LACoFD, be assured that your contribution to our operations – whether on the front lines or behind the scenes – is meaningful and appreciated by those we serve.

In a recent issue of our electronic newsletter, *LACoFD Size-Up*, we reported that our Urban Search and Rescue Team achieved a “Heavy Team” classification following a three-day rigorous drill and evaluation by a multinational United Nations (UN) team of representatives.

This classification affirms USAR’s ability to mobilize, deploy and operate in a manner consistent with UN criteria during an international crisis. They are only the second team in the United States with this designation. While individual USAR members have previously been deployed internationally, this “Heavy Team” classification allows our California Task Force 2 Team to respond to large scale disasters. In terms of radius, this has certainly redefined ours.

This prestigious designation is global recognition of not only our USAR team’s skills but an affirmation of our service excellence. Each day, our first responders drill in our local neighborhoods to prepare for community response, just as USAR prepares to respond to the world. In their case, the United Nations evaluated their skills and abilities. Locally, what is service excellence and how will we measure our performance?


As an emergency services agency, our service excellence initiatives stem from the areas of emergency services, administrative services and communication. Externally, it means improving emergency response times through technology, analysis and enhancement of existing practice, and many other service excellence initiatives. Internally, it means conducting business transactions within our Department and viewing our coworkers as customers, as well as improving business processes.

Since the beginning of the current fiscal year seven months ago, all levels of our management team began collaborating to define what service excellence means for us. We have named 2007 as the “Year of Service Excellence,” dedicating ourselves to continued improvement of our service levels across our organization. While we look forward to identifying and implementing service excellence efforts, it is always worthwhile to look back at our accomplishments from the previous fiscal year. Recently, these were published in the County’s Annual Report (see inset box).



Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman

As we move into the year, we are energized by our ambitious plans to respond to high growth areas in the County by planning seven new fire stations. We also plan to permanently relocate the East County Air Squad to the City of Industry and construct a new Lifeguard Paramedic Station in the City of Avalon on Catalina Island. At the heart of our construction plans remains our plan to break ground on our new Fire Department headquarters facility in East Los Angeles – our “base camp” for our daily administrative operations.

It promises to be another busy year as our radius continues to grow! 

Major Accomplishments of 2005 / 2006

- Streamlined the firefighter recruitment process by creating a continual application filing system for candidate selection, saving the Department significant expense.
- Initiated a study of the long-term fire protection and life safety needs of the growing Santa Clarita Valley, including a master plan for the construction of new fire stations.
- County ocean lifeguards won the United States Lifesaving National Championship for the 20th consecutive year for a total of 33 wins.
- A \$4.1 million federal grant further expanded the Department’s Homeland Security infrastructure, including development of the regional, public safety Del Valle Training Center and acquisition of several major incident response vehicles.
- Garnered two awards from the County Quality and Productivity Commission for the Department’s 12-Lead EKG Program and the Coastal Monitoring Network.
- Implemented the East County Air Squad, a 24-hour air paramedic squad to serve the San Gabriel Valley, greatly improving medical outcomes for trauma patients in the east portion of the County.
- Developed and implemented a new electronic Badge Tracking System and procured enterprise software, hardware and services to support the Department’s Information Technology infrastructure upgrade.
- Continued to expand the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to now include 28 cities, 8 unincorporated communities and 7,000 volunteers within the Department’s service area, further increasing community-level readiness in the event of a major disaster.
- Responded USAR Team members in support of the USAID and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance to provide humanitarian aid for victims of the Islamabad Earthquake in Pakistan.
- Created an emergency management plan for the community of Topanga, in conjunction with other County agencies, the Third Supervisorial District and community groups, resulting in the publication of the Topanga Disaster Survival Guide to help local residents evacuate during wind-driven brush fires and other emergencies.
- Developed a new internet website to improve the public’s knowledge about the Fire Department and its services and programs.
- Completed the initial phase of the Department’s Radio Upgrade Project, including the research, evaluation and procurement of 3,850 portable UHF and VHF radios to replace all hand-held radios.
- Developed a County-wide mutual aid plan with 20 major ambulance companies to provide ambulance response to a major or catastrophic event.

Someone to Talk To

When LACoFD Fire Fighter Paramedic Mike Dubron learned that he had stage three colorectal cancer in 2003, he went through what all cancer patients go through initially – the shock of the diagnosis, the worry about what the future might hold and a surging undercurrent of feelings about contemplating one's own mortality.

For Dubron, the future is looking bright. In February 2007, he is cancer free for four years. What helped him get through it was talking. Looking back, he wanted to speak with fellow firefighters but didn't know how to find others dealing with the "Big C."

In the darkness of his own personal moments, Dubron came up with the idea of creating a cancer survivor network for firefighters and their family members living in the Los Angeles area. One year into his own remission, he began to envision the group and what it would offer.

He first shared his idea with his wife, Kerstin, who "was just as excited as I was," says Dubron. When he took it to his supervisor, Air Operations Battalion Chief Anthony Marrone, he received support and encouragement. Next, he sent a 703 form up the chain of command, requesting to meet with Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman to formally present his idea.

"Chief Freeman welcomed me – and my idea," says Dubron.

Not realizing at the time just how big his "idea" would become, Dubron also requested and received much assistance and support from IAFF Local 1014 as he forged ahead to create the Firefighter Cancer Support Network. "I had no idea how to organize, create bylaws or obtain a non-profit certification, so I just began knocking on doors for help. And everyone helped."

He studied samples of Departmental policies and procedures, established bylaws and recruited a small, dedicated board of directors made up of coworkers and cancer survivors who knew what was at stake.

Soon, word of mouth spread throughout the Department, followed by an internal briefing announcing that the Firefighter Cancer Support Network's first official meeting would take place on September 22, 2005, at the LAO Training Center. It was showtime.

Together with board members Paul Soteropolous, Jerry McClelland, John Thomas and Violeta Villalobos, Dubron led the first meeting in a large classroom, where fellow cancer survivors came to find firefighter shoulders to lean on for comfort, strength and hope. In the same room where they trained to become members of L.A.'s bravest, they now came to learn a new drill.

In April 2006, Dubron was invited to speak about the Network at the California Professional Firefighters Association meeting in Anaheim, California, where Local 1014 President Dave Gilotte submitted a resolution to adopt it statewide – it passed unanimously. Last August, a similar resolution was passed by the IAFF at their international meeting held in Toronto, Canada,

establishing formal recognition and support for the new organization. This year, regional directors will be established for North American chapters. Interest has come from as far away as Australia.

Dubron's passion for developing the Network to reach as many people as possible has taken much of his personal time, but he doesn't seem to mind at all.



LACoFD Fire Fighter Paramedic Mike Dubron, founder and president of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.



The Firefighters Cancer Support Network provides the best of what can be offered during medical crises — each other's support.

continued on page 5



On the Line is published quarterly
by the Los Angeles County
Fire Department
1320 N. Eastern Avenue,
Los Angeles, CA 90063-3294

Editor:

Kristina Hajjar

Creative Director:

Christopher Thomas

Photography:

John DeLeon

Contributors:

Retired Fire Captain Dave Boucher,
Robert Karwasky,
Anne Kellogg, M.A., Amy Lozano,
Assistant Chief Michael Metro,
Tina Sanchez, Jude Tadeo,
Carla Williams, Jen Wu

A downloadable copy of this issue
and back issues of
On the Line are available online at
www.fire.lacounty.gov.

Story ideas?

Please call Director of
Communications

Kristina Hajjar at (323) 881-6109
or via e-mail at khajjar@lacofd.org.

OUR MISSION:

The mission of the Los Angeles
County Fire Department is to
protect lives, the environment, and
property by providing prompt,
skillful, and cost-effective fire
protection and life safety services.

OUR VISION:

The Los Angeles County Fire
Department will be an exemplary
organization acclaimed for our
national reputation, our regional
strength, and our hometown
attentiveness as we provide fire
protection and life safety services.

OUR CORE VALUES:

Integrity, Teamwork,
Caring, Courage, Commitment
and Community



Carla Williams
Chief of Human Resources

H R C O R N E R

Ever wondered what exactly is the Human Resources Division? Who works there? What do they do in addition to providing you with a paycheck?

In the Los Angeles County Fire Department, the Human Resources Division includes five sections and units: Personnel, Payroll, Examinations & Classification, Recruitment, and Background. Their work is highlighted in an article on page 16 of this edition of *On the Line*.

To help you learn more about how to protect your family in the event of an emergency, the Payroll Section has begun to provide you with a copy of the monthly Emergency Survival Program (ESP) topics, along with your paycheck. Please read these and use the guidelines to enhance the safety and survival of your family. Don't miss these -- the family that benefits could be yours!

Someone to Talk To

continued from page 4

"I've had to learn to manage my time better," he says. "It has impacted my family but they understand and help me, especially my wife."

As firefighters are known to "take care of their own," Dubron says that many firefighters have stepped up to help meet the group's financial needs. To start, Local 1014 purchased a Skyline trade show booth to help publicize their mission at special events. "I used to think that charities waste money but now that I am heavily involved in one, I understand that funding is always an issue. Someone needs to run the charity and that costs money," he says.

Funds have also come in from grateful members of the fire service, families and friends of deceased members, payroll deduction donations and Fire Department vendor day proceeds. Soon, the Network plans to open an online store on their website, www.FirefighterCancerSupport.org, and release a New York-style sweatshirt to be approved for on-duty wear by LACoFD personnel.

Wrapping up a whirlwind first year, Network members celebrated the organization's first anniversary at the LAO Training Center last September, committing to remain focused on their mission of helping others deal with cancer, educate members about cancer screenings and early detection, and promote an awareness that cancer does not have to be dealt with alone.

Creating a real network of firefighter cancer survivors remains key. "We are now working with other groups to let them know that we are here. We spend a lot of time visiting other fire departments with information about us. It's all about connecting our folks with others," he says.

The Network now meets on the third Thursday of odd number months to give members an opportunity to find that personal connection and hope from others.

"Over the past year, we have received e-mail messages and letters from people all across the country, thanking us for starting the Network," he says. For Dubron, it's simple: Everyone just needs someone to talk to.

That's just what Fire Fighter Paramedic Roy Rodriguez needed when he was diagnosed last August with cutaneous T-cell lymphoma. Just weeks before, he

continued on page 15

Fitness for LIFE

by Jude Tadeo

Before taking one step toward attacking a fire, a firefighter dons more than 70 pounds of firefighting equipment. This dangerous and physically demanding profession requires firefighters to be in top physical condition. Cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and flexibility, and agility are all required to meet the daunting and often unpredictable physical challenges of firefighting.

Photo by Chris Jensen

“The nature of the job requires firefighters to go from a stand still to full speed, and it’s not only full speed in the sense of speed, but quite often it involves a very hazardous situation. It may involve life and death for citizens, and it requires the firefighters to exert themselves emotionally as well as physically. Firefighting is a strenuous, labor intensive endeavor. The cardiac capability and cardiac wellness of a firefighter is extremely important,” said Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman.

The Wellness Fitness Initiative (WFI)

In 1996, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) established the Wellness Fitness Initiative to enhance firefighter wellness, health and safety, while ultimately improving their quality of life now and into retirement. The initiative required that the program be mutually agreed upon and supported by the fire department and its local union-represented members.

The Wellness/Fitness Initiative includes five components: **Medical Evaluation, Fitness Evaluation, Rehabilitation, Behavioral Health and Data Collection.**

The Los Angeles County Fire Department, in partnership with Local 1014, committed to serve as one of 10 task force departments to help develop and implement program principles. To launch this effort, the Department reinstituted annual medical exams and provided fire stations and other work sites with exercise equipment and educational materials on health and fitness.

Medical Examination

The foundation of Wellness Fitness Program is the medical examination, which is designed to screen for underlying health problems. “We screen for skin cancer, prostate cancer, colon cancer, heart disease, hypertension, liver disorders, diabetes and pulmonary diseases,” said Fire Captain George Cruz, program coordinator.

According to LACoFD Exercise Physiologist Bob Karwasky, the medical screening has caught several cases of cancer that have been treated and that would have been undisclosed without this testing.

The medical examination provides doctors with useful information for assessing future risks. It also gives them baseline information for determining the significant causes of any future changes in a firefighter’s health and

fitness. A series of physical fitness tests also help firefighters gauge the effectiveness of their fitness program relative to the job requirements.

Firefighters are tested at any one of five contracted medical facilities. The Program staff works with the Los Angeles County Occupational Health Program (OHP) to ensure the consistency of top quality service.

Firefighters with suspected cardiac abnormalities can be evaluated on the same day at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. "Inevitably, when you test for heart disease, you get a lot of positive exams. About five percent will reveal something unusual in the ECG that requires follow up; of this, 85-90 percent are false positives and do not indicate heart disease. There's really nothing to worry about, but you don't know until you follow up and look at it," said Karwasky.

Since the program began, at least 41 cases of mild to moderate heart disease had been detected. "All of these firefighters were treated and returned to work," added Karwasky.

Firefighters whose medical condition was caught in time were able to get treatment and return to duty in the shortest possible time. They also avoided the possible adverse consequences of delaying treatment.

Other Components

According to Cruz, the rehabilitation and data collection components of the Wellness Fitness Program have not yet been implemented. As envisioned by the initiative's designers, rehabilitation of firefighters injured in the field should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the firefighting profession. For example, the exercises used should correlate with what firefighters do during fireground operations. The Department is not yet

doing this, said Cruz.

Regarding data collection, the Department would first like to have baseline information on the health and fitness status of its 2,800-member firefighting workforce. This information, usually in the form of aggregate data and statistics, will help the Department to develop programs that address the issues revealed by the data. "If the data reveal obesity or a low fitness level, then we may develop educational programs or materials on nutrition or physical fitness," said Cruz.

In the meantime, the physical fitness scores of the last 23 recruit classes have been collected and analyzed. According to Karwasky, the data demonstrates how effective the recruits' physical training has been. "We get them in shape and we have the numbers to back it up," said Karwasky. They also measure their physical fitness at four and 10 months post-academy.

Another program component is behavioral health. The Department contracts with a team of mental health specialists to provide support services all members of the Department.

Employees may also seek private consultation and referral services through the County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Low Compliance

In spite of the program's good intentions, there has been relatively low compliance in recent years when it comes to the medical examination. According to Cruz, compliance was at 75-80 percent in 2000 but by 2006, compliance had dropped to 40-50 percent. He said that some firefighters may not want to take their medical exam out of fear of discovering a medical condition that can preclude them from continuing their career. Clearly, a new approach was needed. The Department



Photo by John Ames

Firefighters undergo a series of tests to measure strength and flexibility.

and Local 1014 agreed that a new program, called “Fitness for Life,” could provide an incentive for firefighters to attend their yearly medical exams.

Fitness for Life Program (FFL)

On July 1, 2006, the Fitness for Life Program replaced the Department’s Wellness Fitness Program. Although the medical examination and behavioral health components remain the same, Fitness for Life is different. Now, a financial incentive is given to firefighters to complete their medical examination off duty and meet other program requirements.

During the first two years of the program, firefighters must put forth a “good faith effort” to complete all phases of their medical examination, scheduled in their birth month. In addition, they must complete 12 hours of online continuing education.

In the third year of the program, however, firefighters will also be required to meet three fitness goals during their medical exam. They must have a Maximum Oxygen Consumption (Max VO₂) of 40 ml/kg/min, and do 24 or more push-ups and 35 or more sit-ups. (Max VO₂ is a measure of cardiovascular fitness, and this level is consistent with the requirements necessary to climb stairs in full firefighting gear.)

The key purpose of the medical examination is to provide firefighters with baseline information on their medical and physical status. Knowing where they stand will help them make better health choices, including increased physical fitness. The Department has also started data collection on firefighter wellness while making sure that medical confidentiality is observed. None of a firefighter’s individual, identifiable medical information is ever sent to the Department.

So far, the results have been encouraging. Compliance percentages for the first four months of the program, July to October 2006, were 94 percent, 86 percent, 78 percent, and 87 percent, respectively. These percentages

represent a significant improvement in compliance. “We expect this to go even higher,” said Freeman.

Cruz is also committed to disseminating program information to further improve compliance. “We have to market this program through continuing education. We will also market it through union and Departmental publications. I’ll continue to visit the fire stations and highlight the program and its intent. I’ll also address concerns like work restriction and confidentiality,” he said.

Everyone involved recognizes the need for all firefighters to be healthy and fit. The benefits of the program are expected to extend beyond a firefighter’s



Photo by John Ames

The treadmill test is a key component to measure cardiac fitness.

career; wellness during a firefighter’s career will carry over into retirement.

“When one thinks about it, firefighters, due to the nature of the work, are professional athletes. Firefighters, just like athletes, in order to win the fight against fire and win the battle in saving lives of others, have got to take care of themselves. They have got to be fit. They have got to be well. That’s why this program is so important. Involvement in the Fitness for Life means firefighters will not only be saving the lives of others, but they’ll be doing a lot to save their own life,” said Freeman.



WORKING OUT...

Fire Station 3 Style



Fire Captain Derek Alkonis (at left, standing) at Fire Station 3-C is a big believer in total body fitness for firefighters. As the original Fire Captain who served as the Wellness/Fitness Coordinator, Alkonis strived to place exercise equipment such as this in each LACoFD fire station to promote fitness. He has continually served as a fitness role model for many in the Department looking to improve overall health and professional readiness for duty. At Fire Station 3, exercising is a big part of the daily routine, as firefighters build their strength together as a team.



Photos by Bruce Jones



R E T I R E E S

June

*Schriver, Alvin T. — Battalion Chief
Flanders, Daniel R. — Fire Captain*

July

*Reyna, Herminia — Data Systems Analyst
Faragher, Vicki — Senior Secretary III
Miller, Thomas F. — Fire Fighter Specialist
Perkins, Stanley — Fire Captain*

August

*Foster, Anthony W. — Fire Captain
Jones Jr., Isaac C. — Fire Fighter
Romero, Martin P. — Fire Captain*

September

Sanchez, Henry — Fire Captain

October

*Adams, Charles L. — Fire Fighter Specialist
Lockwood, Stephen W. — Rescue Boat LT*

November

*Borgio, William J. — Fire Captain
Dick, Edward L. — Fire Fighter*

December

*Paben, Donn L. — Fire Captain
Borthwick, William G. — Fire Captain
Smith, Donald F. — Fire Fighter Specialist*

Career Fitness

by Jen Wu

At any given moment, a firefighter may be called to the scene of a burning building, a raging wild brush fire, an urban search and rescue mission, a hazardous chemical spill, a bomb threat or even a terrorist attack. Firefighting duties may also require crew members to sacrifice their own physical well-being to protect the lives and properties of the people they serve. Faced with such responsibility and arduous challenge over a typical 30-year career, firefighters must adopt a consistent fitness regimen to ensure a long, productive career and a healthy retirement.

To illustrate this, three Los Angeles County firefighters were profiled, including a new recruit, a mid-career professional and a firefighter near retirement. Although each fall in different stages, each brings a similar perspective on personal fitness and wellness.

FIRE FIGHTER RYAN TAYLOR

As a new recruit to the Department, Fire Fighter Ryan Taylor of Fire Station 36 is part of the Fitness for Life (FFL) Program “generation.” At 24, Taylor is poised to fully maximize the preventative health benefits offered through the new FFL program, aimed at promoting wellness medical exams for the Department’s safety members. “Being as new as I am, I feel lucky that there is this kind of bonus...a reward for taking care of yourself. I think in this job, with the things we put ourselves through and the things we’re exposed to, it’s a good idea to get a check up,” Taylor said.

Recalling his physical condition before recruit training, he plans to fully participate in the program. “I was nowhere near the Department’s standards, not even the minimum,” Taylor reflected. “In the beginning, my fitness level held me back in a lot of areas...I did what I needed to do get to the next stage, but never maintained it,” he shared.

While training, Taylor witnessed changes in his fitness level. He began to perform the basic tasks of throwing ladders or hose lay with greater ease and stamina. Since becoming a firefighter, he has taken his fitness training to another level by developed a more systematic workout approach. He now incorporates the maneuvers and techniques learned through recruit training. “I am able to perform multiple activities now without as much rehab time and with more stamina in reserve. My endurance developed, allowing me to go much further then I was able to before -- and with better focus,” he said.

On days off, Taylor’s workout regimen continues, with more running and weight lifting. His motivation for staying in top physical form is no longer simply to pass a Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) or a medical exam. “I look at every workout as an opportunity to better my performance,” Taylor said.

FIRE FIGHTER SPECIALIST ROBERT THOMAS

Fire Fighter Specialist Robert Thomas, 54, a mid-career firefighter at Fire Station 122, is thankful for having the opportunity to participate in the FFL Program. During his last annual physical exam, he had an



Fire Fighter Ryan Taylor, Fire Station 36



Fire Fighter Specialist Robert Thomas, Fire Station 122

abnormal EKG treadmill stress test reading. “My first thought was that it was just a bad test,” Thomas recalled. A CT scan revealed a significant blockage in his left anterior descending artery. Thomas underwent a catheterization procedure, a process involving the insertion of a tube into the body cavity duct, to remove the blockage.

During the procedure, an additional unseen blockage was discovered. “I would have never guessed or known of any underlying heart conditions if it were not for the annual physical stress test,” said Thomas. Within 24 hours of the procedure, he was home – and glad he took advantage of the benefits of the FFL Program.

Prior to becoming a firefighter, Thomas worked for the Department as a fire equipment mechanic. He sees a close parallel between a mechanic’s apparatus inspection and a firefighter’s annual physical. “Every vehicle, like every person, will have underlying problems, but you have to take action to discover them,” he said. Thomas continues to maintain a regular fitness regimen; running three miles, two to three times a week, incorporating push-ups and stretches in his routines. Fortunately, his latent health condition was discovered in time and he has learned to take better care of his physical health.

FIRE CAPTAIN MARK KYLLINGSTAD

At 54, Fire Captain Mark Kyllingstad of Fire Station 149 looks forward to his pending March 2008 retirement. He admits that serving as a firefighter for almost three decades can be taxing on the body. Over the years, he has noticed some weight gain; his cholesterol level is slowly on the rise; his knees are becoming a little weaker and his lower back is not as strong.

“When I came on the job, I was at seven percent body fat, smoking a pack of cigarettes a day and still overweight according to the height/weight chart. When I quit smoking, I added 40 pounds,” he shared.

Fitness requirements in the past differed from today. “There weren’t any requirements after the Training Tower. We went back for our six and 12-month follow-up and there was no physical training standard,” Kyllingstad added. Nowadays, he watches what he eats and maintains his weight.

In order to achieve and sustain optimum health, he continues to condition his body for the daily grind of the job, doing 30-40 minutes of cardio exercises and lifting free weights at the station. In addition, Kyllingstad makes good use of the medical exams offered through the FFL program. “By taking advantage of the County physicals, I’ve been able to stay on top of my cholesterol,” Kyllingstad said. Like others, he believes that the new incentive offered through the FFL Program will promote a more health and fitness conscious workforce. “... I think it will help with the overall fitness levels of the Department. It’s hard to believe that all members didn’t take advantage of the free, County-purchased medical exams,” said Kyllingstad.

As vigorously as they perform their daily duties, firefighters are encouraged to vigorously invest in their own personal well-being and physical health to ensure a long-lasting career and a comfortable retirement. Whether a new recruit, a mid-career or a near-retirement firefighter, the benefits provided by the FFL Program are too important to ignore.

“The life you save might be your own. It could very well be the most important rescue you ever respond to,” added Thomas.



Fire Captain Mark Kyllingstad, Fire Station 149

CARDIOLOGY PROGRAM SAVES LIVES

by Robert Karwasky



Photo by John Ames

This high speed GE scanner using electron beam computed tomography (EBCT) offers a quick, highly accurate scan of a firefighter's cardiac condition.

The firefighting profession presents unique physical, mental and environmental stresses. Coupled with lifestyle factors, the cumulative impact of these challenges makes heart disease a firefighter's most important health concern. In fact, it is the leading cause of on-duty deaths. LACoFD has long recognized this, and continues a tradition, of implementing innovative and trend-setting programs, such as screening its firefighters for underlying heart disease.

For the past three years, the Los Angeles County Fire Department has enjoyed a special association with Harbor-UCLA Medical Center (H-UCLA) to provide cardiology services and consultation. Testing is conducted at the Saint John's Cardiovascular Building/Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute on the Harbor-UCLA campus in Torrance.

HISTORY

Under the auspices of Los Angeles County Occupational Health Programs, the Department pioneered a comprehensive, mandatory medical

screening program in 1970 that has become a model for countless other programs nationwide. The resulting database of over 50,000 medical exams has led to several widely cited research studies pertaining to firefighter risk for heart disease, physical fitness and mortality. With this early diagnosis and treatment, many potentially catastrophic cardiac events have been prevented.

However, the consequences of indeterminate medical findings, prolonged absence from work and overwhelming follow-up costs are a significant burden that is reluctantly accepted. The present cardiology program has minimized the impact of these obstacles while improving the accuracy of diagnosis.

CARDIAC SCREENING

Screening for underlying heart disease begins with a resting EKG and cardiac stress test during a firefighter's annual medical exam. Approximately five percent of all firefighters will show a potential abnormality and will require further analysis. When this occurs, records are faxed to H-UCLA for a second reading by a Board-

certified cardiologist.

Approximately 20 percent of these are normal and will require no further analysis. The remainder are sufficiently suspect and will require more detailed testing to determine whether or not there is heart disease present. Even though 85-90 percent of these remaining cases will show no indication of heart disease, failure to aggressively and accurately investigate all cases of suspected abnormalities may result in a preventable catastrophic cardiac event.

Among the several procedures available for follow-up testing, electron beam computed tomography (EBCT) offers several important advantages for firefighters. This quick, non-invasive, inexpensive and highly accurate test can be administered and interpreted the same day as the initial exam. The EBCT test scans for the presence of calcium in the coronary arteries. If no calcium is found, as in approximately 75 percent of firefighters scanned, then no significant coronary artery disease is present and the firefighter is able to return to work. Conversely, in the remainder of cases where coronary calcium is found, further testing is required to determine if significant disease is present.

In rare cases, high levels of calcium have revealed potentially life-threatening coronary artery blockages. When calcium scores indicate the possibility of significant disease, a minimally invasive electron beam angiography (EBA) scan is conducted that will help determine the extent of artery

obstruction, if any. This test uses the same electron beam scanner to provide high-resolution, three-dimensional images of the heart following the injection of a contrast isotope solution. When needed, this test is usually available within a day of the initial exam. The results are interpreted immediately and there is no recovery needed. This is an accurate alternative for the standard coronary angiography exam, which is invasive, expensive and requires hospitalization.


H-UCLA has been one of the most influential contributors in the emergence of EBCT scanning as a state of the art tool for the early detection of coronary artery disease. Dr. Charles McKay, chief of the Division of Cardiology, Dr. Matthew J. Budoff, and Dr. J. Michael Criley, who developed the Los Angeles County paramedic system, are prominent H-UCLA cardiologists providing consultation services. H-UCLA has performed 50,000 EBCTs and more EBAs than any other center in the United States and have published hundreds of research studies. Budoff is the lead author of the recently published American Heart Association Scientific Statement, "Assessment of Coronary Artery Disease by Computed Tomography," a long-awaited document that promises to have a significant influence on the standard of practice in the early diagnosis of coronary heart disease.

In the past three years, H-UCLA has provided consultation on 302 cases of suspected heart disease on Los Angeles County firefighters, resulting in 238 EBCT scans. These scans have confirmed the presence of

coronary heart disease in 42 firefighters, almost all at an early stage. While these 42 cases represent only 0.7 percent of all firefighters who have participated in their Fitness For Life medical examination, it is safe to assume this screening has prevented several catastrophic cardiac events. Additionally, often these findings come as quite a surprise to a healthy firefighter.

The experience of recently retired 1014 Vice-President Don Lassig is a good example of this. "The calcium scan program at H-UCLA is invaluable. I figured that I would sail through with flying colors because of all the cardio exercise I do, but lo and behold, I had the beginnings of a blockage which the doctor assured me could be rectified by taking a baby aspirin a day, which I immediately began to do," he said. "The Cardiology program is a definite asset to our membership, which will most certainly save lives in the future."

SUMMARY

It is estimated that this program has saved from \$450,000 to \$1.27 million by expediting the return to work process and preventing unnecessary Worker's Compensation claims. It is hoped that increased awareness of this state of the art, life-saving program will encourage all firefighters to take the first step in the process by participating in an annual medical examination. For further information, contact Captain George Cruz, Fitness for Life coordinator, or Exercise Physiologist Bob Karwasky at (323) 881-2371. 



WHAT IS STRESSFUL TO FIREFIGHTERS?

by Anne Kellogg, MA

It is Saturday night and you have seven hours left before the end of your shift. It has been a long three days, and even though you need the overtime, it has been especially hard to be away from your family because of all the “emergencies” going on: the garbage disposal backed up, the dog ate through the sprinkler heads, your four-year-old has a bad chest cold and the baby is still not sleeping through the night. Your wife is on her last nerve and you can’t be home to help her...again. You are helping others tonight, and this call looks like a bad one. T/C... persons trapped... minivan... children involved... media helicopter overhead. Your muscles are aching from pulling hose on a fire earlier in the day and your lungs still feel scorched. Your throbbing headache might be from dehydration, lack of sleep, or the constant fire station chatter. You haven’t eaten a decent meal all day, yet you do your best to relax and mentally prepare on the way to the call, reminding yourself, the shift is almost over. Sound familiar?

Although stress is a normal part of any job, firefighters experience layers of challenges that can test the resiliency of even the toughest. Long work hours, sleep deprivation, time away from family, cumulative exposure to trauma, physical demands, living in tight quarters with other personalities, potential injury and exposure to infectious disease, exposure to traumatic natural and man-made incidents, making life and death decisions under intense scrutiny – these are all in the job description. Yet, repeatedly, firefighters will tell you, without hesitation, they love what they do. So, what is stressful to firefighters and exactly how are they able to successfully manage work-related stress?

Time is a common theme related to stress management in the fire service. We cannot control when a recall will occur, the exact duration of a brush assignment, if a shift falls on your child’s birthday, or if you miss your time of fellowship in a month of Sundays, let alone the amount of time required to commute to work each shift. We can control voluntary changes in the routine. The work schedule allows for trading shifts, taking days off, and picking up an occasional overtime shift. This flexibility can allow for planned time together with family and friends, create opportunities to schedule mini-vacations,

and/or simply allow for down time to rest and recuperate between shifts. Overtime can create financial flexibility for fun and relaxation at a later date – if it doesn’t get out of hand. As one 22-year veteran put it, “People get in trouble when they start relying on overtime to pay their bills.” He goes on to suggest that solid budget planning should not be driven by “bigger, better, faster.” Always remember that priceless commodity, time.

Work-related exposure to intense circumstances is another frequently mentioned on-the-job stressor. The experience of physical injury, infectious disease and repeated exposure to traumatic incidents is further compounded by the threat of terrorist-related events. Add in sleep deprivation, high call volume, prolonged time on stressful incidents, life and death decisions, saturated hospital systems, and lots of paperwork -- accompanied with intense pride and scrutiny related to all aspects of the job. A fellow firefighter offered this advice:

You need to know when to say when, and take a break before your stress levels become beyond your coping abilities. As firefighters, we tend to take on too much. It’s what we are trained to do, and a lot of us were that way before we got on the job. It’s imperative to listen to your mind and body and take a break when we feel the warning signs of a system overworked.

Several of our paramedic squads have over 300,000 miles on them, and each and every mile is carried by our personnel running those calls. What is considered “normal” to our folks is unimaginable to most people. This type of stress can have serious consequences as we spend so much time attending to the needs of others, that we have little left to process everything that we are experiencing. Sometimes the consequences are physical: injury, high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, stroke, obesity. Behavioral issues may also manifest: drug and alcohol abuse, spending, gambling and other addictive behaviors; anxiety and/or depression. Unprocessed stress can also wreak havoc on our relationships and intimate life – divorce and broken families being one of the painful outcomes for many of our personnel.

Relationships also bring job-related stress. If you take a survey among firefighters, relationships with their coworkers, significant others and families will consistently emerge as a great source of stress, as well as an even greater

continued on page 15

Someone to Talk To

attended a Local 1014 meeting held to encourage firefighters to take the annual medical examination.

"I was feeling fatigued more than normal and thought that I was just getting older," said Rodriguez, 40. "I wasn't losing weight but I noticed bumps on my face and then some lesions. After seeking help from two different dermatologists with no improvement, I knew that something else was going on."

His suspicions were correct. While working overtime at Fire Station 19, Rodriguez received a call from his doctor, informing him that he had lymphoma. He quietly worked the rest of his shift in disbelief. A few days later, he came to work his regular shift at Fire Station 26 and shared the news with fellow crew members and left early that afternoon. Since then, he has been receiving radiation and interferon treatments to help him reach remission.

"I miss going to work each day. I've been with the Department since I was 15 years old – I started out as an Explorer and then worked in the camps before becoming a firefighter," said Rodriguez.

When Dubron found out that Rodriguez was diagnosed, he immediately came to help.


"The Firefighter Cancer Support Network is unbelievable," Rodriguez said. "When I was diagnosed,

continued from page 5

Mike [Dubron] drove all of the way from his home in the Santa Clarita Valley out to my home in Fontana to pick me up for my doctor's appointment in Los Angeles. He asked my doctor many important questions about my treatment options. And emotionally, he has always been there for me because he knows what I'm facing."

Rodriguez is not surprised to learn that the organization is spreading like wildfire across the country, as firefighters seek out their own brand of support. "It's tailored for firefighters because most of the people offering support are firefighter cancer survivors and they know how I'm feeling. We work side by side each day and these guys make me feel the brotherhood and the camaraderie that I miss so much," he said. "As soon as I start feeling better, I'm planning to attend the support group meetings."

In the meantime, Rodriguez is trying to spend more time with family and friends and "just take it all in." Recently, he took up a friend's offer to fly in a small plane along the coast of Southern California. "I have a whole different outlook on life. There's no time to be bitter or feel sorry for myself," he said.

To access services or find out more about the Network, including ways to provide financial support, visit their website at www.FirefighterCancerSupport.org, or call 1-866-994-FCSN. 


FIREFIGHTERS STRESS

continued from page 14

source of comfort. Among firefighters, there is never a shortage of advice or opinions. Furthermore, you put a group of high-achieving, high-adrenalin, group-oriented, detail-focused, highly intense folks together in tight quarters and you have a recipe for...let's just call it "excitement." Shift wars, gossip, cliques, personality conflicts are all hazards of the firehouse. Conversely, you will never find a more fiercely proud and cohesive profession. "Crew bonding" and talking with peers consistently rank as the highest forms of stress relief among firefighters.

Similarly, relationships at home can bring a complex mixture of stress and comfort. Not wanting to burden their families with the realities of the job, missing significant family events and milestones while away at work, and feeling utterly exhausted when returning home are frustrations commonly mentioned by firefighters as well as by their family members. "Communication, communication, communication..." is key, according to one battalion chief who has been married for over 25 years. Birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays may not be celebrated on the exact date, vacations may get postponed,

the "honey-do" list may take a bit longer to finish, but the whole family regularly shares their thoughts and feelings related to the realities of the fire service. They also regularly remind themselves of the countless benefits. Who else gets a parent who can come to school in the middle of the day, or a spouse who steals you away for a mid-week mini vacation? And who else can fully claim with a deep resolve that their work literally touches the lives of countless individuals?

So, how are firefighters able to successfully manage their work-related stress? Through their adaptive nature, hearty resiliency, constructive coping strategies, regular exercise, proper nutrition, plenty of rest, a healthy sense of humor, and steadfast support from their families and co-workers. To provide help, the Department's Peer Support and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Programs, Fitness for Life Unit, Chaplains Office, Health Programs Section, and mental health professionals are all part of the resources available to support the overall wellness of our personnel and their families. Stress is an inevitable part of any job – it is how you choose to respond that determines your success. 

Behind the Scenes wi

by Amy Lozano



Tracy Flores

Employees working in the field of emergency response and rescue encounter some of the most unique on-the-job experiences. Imagine, then, the unique experiences our Human Resources Division employees encounter in their day-to-day job of keeping track of the personnel and payroll needs of the Fire Department's over 4,000 employees in over 200 job classifications. Ensuring the needs of each and every employee is quite a challenge but an exciting one, says Carla Williams, chief of the Human Resources Division. "Whether you are civilian or sworn, with us for one year or 30 years, we're here to provide the best customer service to you."

There are three sections in Human Resources Division: Personnel Services, Payroll, and Examinations and Classifications. The Personnel Services Section is responsible for providing customer service to all employees throughout their entire career with the Department. This means handling all the processing of employees from the moment they join the Department until they leave us via transfer or retirement. The 16 members of the section orient new hires through the entire introductory process, explaining benefits, issuing identification cards and badges, and then following them throughout their careers, ensuring all raises, bonuses, and

promotions are enacted. "What is really unique to the Fire Department is that two-thirds of our employees are here for their entire career," says Williams. "Some firefighters begin their careers as young as 19 years old and stay until their sixties. Because of this, Personnel Section staff has the rare opportunity to "grow up" with their employees, and be there with them through their major life events."

The Payroll Section staff also gets to know the employees they oversee very well. Each of the 14 Payroll clerks is responsible for the timekeeping of over 300 employees. This means not only keeping track of the various work schedules their employees could be working at any given time period (56-hour, 5/40, and 9/80 shifts) but also overtime calculations, temporary and seasonal employment, time corrections, reconciling pay overages and shortages and answering phone calls from employees with questions about their paychecks. While the mission of the Section initially seems straightforward, the highly specialized job classifications and various work schedules make the payroll system well-known as the most complicated one in the entire County.

If the sheer number of employees to keep track of isn't enough, the specialized classifications of our employees are a challenge in itself. The eight-member Examinations and Classifications Section is responsible



Edna Flores, Center, and Kiran Sahni, right, meet with a member of their staff.

th the Human Resources Division

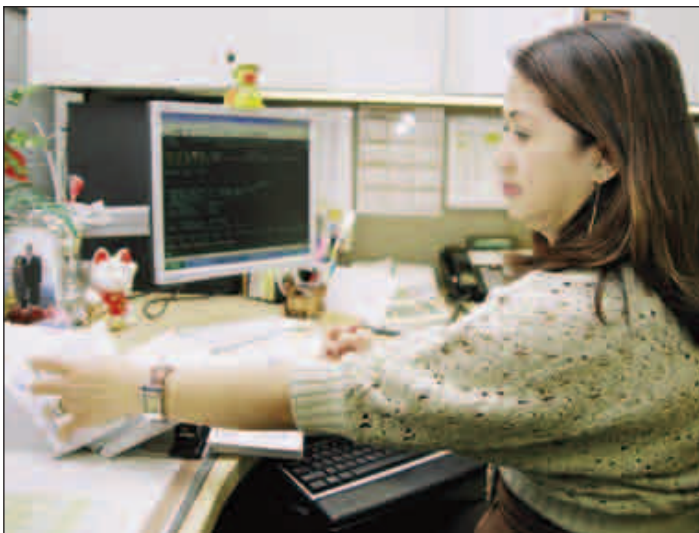
Photos by John Ames

for planning, developing, and executing these unique exams. They average 50 exams per year -- almost one per week. Because they are specific only to our organization, the Department conducts its own exams with direction and authorization from the Chief Deputies and the Fire Chief. Most of the exams produce a very large number of applicants, such as the Fire Fighter Trainee exam, drawing several thousand applicants, and the Ocean Lifeguard exam, producing several hundred.

Working closely with the Examinations Unit, the Classifications Unit categorizes class items, verifies experience, evaluates job duties, and determines if an applicant has met the criteria for a classification. They also determine out-of-class and additional responsibilities bonuses, and justify why we need additional positions when creating the annual budget. This section plays a critical role in maintaining the appropriate staffing levels needed to carry out our mission.



Grace Mestas




Rozanna Patron

Posting an exam is only half of the task when it comes to hiring. Getting the word out to potential applicants is the responsibility of the new Recruitment Unit. This small Unit of two employees is tasked with educating the public about uniformed and civilian career opportunities. Many residents do not realize that jobs in such fields as accounting, information management, and administrative support are also available. Outreach efforts have been conducted at local colleges, military

facilities, job fairs and online. The Recruitment Unit is expanding to create a diverse recruitment team to promote the Department at recruitment events.

Because public safety positions require a high level of public trust, candidates are thoroughly investigated during the application process. The Background Investigation Unit is tasked with this objective. The Unit's 26 captains conduct background checks on potential employees in sensitive positions, including Fire Fighter, Fire Fighter Specialist, Fire Captain, Fleet Specialist, Ocean Lifeguard and others. Sensitive positions are defined as any employees who deal with the public or come in contact with highly valuable materials and/or property. Investigations are conducted through the United States Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, County Sheriff's and the applicant's personal references. Coordination between these different agencies is a challenge but necessary to ensure public trust.

Although their important work is not readily seen by the public, the dedicated members of Human Resources work behind the scenes to support the mission of one of the largest fire departments in the world. 

In My Experience

By Assistant Chief Michael Metro

Often throughout our lives, we are presented with significant events where one decision means success and another decision, tragedy. I had such an event nearly four years ago.

I was 47 years old and it was time for my yearly Wellness Exam. The receptionist who was creating my chart asked if I wanted a PSA blood test. In the back my mind, I knew that the medical journals stated a man should begin having such a test when he turns 50 and I was three years away from that. Nonetheless, I said why not? That offer and the somewhat arbitrary decision to have the blood test saved my life. The test came back positive and I received a personal phone call from the physician at Good Samaritan Hospital urging me to have some additional testing. I followed his instructions and I was later told I had prostate cancer.

Many say that knowledge is power and it certainly was in my case. I spoke with our Department's Medical Director, Dr. Franklin Pratt, who steered me toward gaining knowledge and finding the right doctor. With that knowledge, I felt more in control over a situation that sometimes can be out of control. I interviewed doctors and talked with those who had walked down the road that I was just beginning. My research had shown me the survival rates of various types of treatments and the side effects of each. I began to make decisions based upon sound research instead of trusting the first doctor that I came in contact with. When the options were placed in front of me, I already knew the particulars of each and what to expect. I confidently made my

choices and knew my chances. I can hardly describe the peace and confidence that provided. That is one of the reasons I am so grateful for the Firefighter Cancer Support Network and the dedication that Fire Fighter Paramedic Mike Dubron and others have shown to this organization. Although my cancer struck prior to the advent of the program, I can certainly see the benefits today for those that are confronted with such a challenging disease.

The day of my surgery came and rather than the dread and nervousness that most understandably feel, I was ready. The results were just as expected, except my doctor told me that the cancer had extended to the outer boundaries of the gland and were ready to spread to the rest of my body. Three years before the suggested age for testing, I had prostate cancer that had developed sufficiently to the point that it was ready to truly challenge my life.

It has now been four years since my surgery with no side effects but most importantly, and I have been cancer free. One more year and I will be classified as a complete cure. During the last four years, I have had exams every six months, all the tests coming back negative. That has been fantastic news but, unfortunately, I lost a friend last year to prostate cancer. He did not get his PSA exam until he presented with symptoms and then it was too late. At the funeral, as anyone can imagine, the memories of my disease came flooding back. If I would have said no to the offer of a blood test, and waited until I was 50, the cancer



would have been discovered throughout my body and I would have come face to face with my mortality. Most likely, I would have been well down the road to a painful and slow death, like the friend whose memory we were there to celebrate. As I considered the road I had traveled the last four years and I thought of how it could have been so different. Often, when a person makes a poor choice, they regret and think if only I had taken a different path. It caused me to thank God that, at that point in time, I had no regrets for the decision I made.

An arbitrary decision, yet one that allowed me to continue to enjoy my family and my life. Yes, a simple decision, yet one with life changing implications. If not for the Wellness Fitness exam, I know for a fact I would not have had a PSA exam at 47. At 50, I may have had the test, if I remembered and if it was convenient and I now know what the results would have been. I can say without a doubt, that the Wellness Fitness exam saved my life.

I often think back to that question and my answer. Little did I know then, the value of a few simple words.



JOIN LACo FIRED-UP TOASTMASTERS CLUB!



Front row l-r: John Todd, Kimberleigh Lundwall, Cathy Hartman, LaFonda Riggins, Esperanza Sanchez. Middle row l-r: William Hill (VP of Membership), Karen Gilham, Andre Gougis (Sergeant-at-Arms). Back row l-r: Dan Palma, Jude Tadeo, Frank Forman, Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman, Tony Duran (VP of Education), Jesse Diaz, Deborah Gholston-Joseph (VP of Public Relations).

Do you shy away from expressing yourself? Then Toastmasters may be for you! Toastmasters Club is a self-paced program designed to give you the skills and confidence you need to express yourself in any situation. The club environment is friendly and supportive, allowing you to build confidence with each speaking assignment. Members set your own goals and receive constructive feedback from fellow members. Many members of the Department have joined and are already benefiting from their involvement.


"Toastmasters has helped me in every aspect of my life," says Community Service Representative La Fonda Riggins. "My job requires me to have direct phone contact with 12 different cities in our East Region. I have found that even when speaking with city officials, I use techniques I have learned. I would recommend this wonderful organization to anyone."

Club meetings are held each Tuesday from 12 noon until 1 p.m. in the second floor conference room of the Fire Command & Control Center at Fire Department headquarters. Guests are always welcome.

"After just giving two prepared speeches, I have gained a lot of confidence in my public speaking skills," said Jude Tadeo of the Headquarters Support Section. "I now find myself actively participating in meetings. I always knew I had good ideas. With Toastmasters, I found my voice."

Toastmasters Club members and guests were recently joined by Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman at their weekly Toastmasters meeting. Members gave prepared speeches and were awarded ribbons for the Best Speech and Evaluator. Each meeting gives members an opportunity to develop their communication and leadership skills.

"Toastmasters has enhanced my communication skills, listening skills and my leadership skills. It's amazing to see the progress of the group," said Esperanza Sanchez of the Manual Revisions Unit. Captain Tony Duran of the Safety Office agrees. "I have looked forward to improving my speaking skills and have not been disappointed so far."

For membership information, e-mail William Hill at Jhalgen@earthlink.net, or Captain Duran at (323) 881-3078 or e-mail TDuran@lacofd.org. 



Digging Into our History


By Retired Fire Captain Dave Boucher

This issue focuses on a meal ticket good for one meal at a Forester and Fire Warden fire camp. This ticket is about the size of a current California driver's license. The stub has been torn off, but since it has not been signed, it has never been used and is in excellent condition.

Why, I hear you ask, would anyone need a ticket to go through the chow line on a brush fire? I couldn't figure it out either, so I asked one of our long-time retirees, Fred Venneman of Fire Station 69 fame, if he had ever seen anything like this. Luckily, he had and proceeded to tell me about it.

It seems that during the Great Depression (1930-1938 or thereabouts), several hundred volunteer hand crew firefighters were trained to fight brush fires. Included in this number were the Civilian Conversation Corps (CCC) men and boys who worked for the Forester and Fire Warden on all sorts of wildland construction projects. Some U.S. Army personnel were also given firefighting training (notably in the Point Dume Camp) and were also used to supervise the Army personnel and the CCC personnel whenever they were used for brush firefighting. Reimbursement of the Forester and Fire Warden for feeding non-members was accomplished through the use of tickets like this one.

One wonders about the amount of bookwork necessary to account for every meal eaten. Note that the ticket has a serial number and must be dated and signed by the user. True to form, the ticket has a department form number in the upper left corner (F.D. 69). Do you suppose it was necessary to surrender one of these to receive one of the infamous sack lunches issued to thousands of firefighters over the years? (you know...2 bologna sandwiches, a piece of fruit, a cherry or apple pie section by Johnston and maybe a candy bar).

And so we have shared yet another piece of the puzzle that is the history of what we have come to call the Los Angeles County Fire Department. 



FIRE MUSEUM PREPARES TO MOVE

LACoFD's Historian, Retired Fire Captain Dave Boucher, is hard at work packing up the County of Los Angeles Fire Museum Association's photo collection and historical documents in preparation for its upcoming move to a new location. Currently located at the Cecil R. Gehr Combat Training Center, the small museum will be demolished to make way for construction of the Fire Department's new headquarters facility.